DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 379 CG 017 621

AUTHOR Asbridge, Donald J.
TITLE A Process of Identity Formation in Relation to Peers and Peer Groups.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (Las Vegas, NV, April 25-28, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Elementary Secondary Education; Identification (Psychology); Interpersonal Competence; Models; Peer Acceptance; *Peer Groups; *Peer Influence; Reference Groups; Self Concept; Self Esteem; Social Development; Socialization
IDENTIFIERS *Identity Formation

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a flowsheet model describing the interpersonal process of adolescent identity formation in relation to peers and peer groups within a social-psychological context. The model describes a primary route, a secondary route, and a vicious circle as pathways toward identity formation in relation to peers and peer groups. In the primary route, individuals associate with a peer group. If accepted by the group and satisfied with their role in the group they will either comply with, identify with, or internalize the group's values, beliefs, and behaviors, and will possess an identity. Any route other than the primary route is a secondary route, and is assumed to involve more conflicts, frustrations, and trials. These are cases where the individual is either unsatisfied or not accepted and will seek a new group or try a new strategy with the same group. In the case of the vicious circle the individual is not accepted after many frustrating attempts, and will either (1) keep trying, (2) become an internally-motivatived prosocial loner or (3) become an antisocial "lone wolf". The model is likened to a production line with the final product being identity. The process is considered to be the same for female and male adolescents. (LLL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED246379

A Process of Identity Formation in Relation to Peers and Peer Groups.

Donald J. Asbridge
Eastern Montana College

RUNNING HEAD: PEER PRESSURES

CG 017621

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Donald J. Asbridge

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

A step-by-step description of an interpersonal process of adolescent identity formation in relation to peers and peer groups was presented. Primary and secondary routes were identified as possible paths toward identity achievement. A "Vicious Circle" was described as a possible "cause" of some prosocial and antisocial behaviors. Outcomes, along an internal-external dimension of satisfaction and acceptance, were hypothesized. Identity was likened to construction of a product along a production line. It was hoped that some theoretical value could be found in the model, if for no other reason, because it was assumed the process was identical for female, as well as male, adolescents.

A Process of Identity Formation in Relation to Peers and Peer Groups.

"I work myself to death, just to fit-in."
(Pete Townshend, 1973)

Many models seek to explain and/or identify the processes and dynamics of adolescent identity formation. Hall, Gesell, Havighurst, Bandura, Freud, Erikson, Piaget, Sullivan, and Heider were some of the more influential theorists, and thousands of studies have been performed by many others.

The purpose of this paper is not an attempt to prove or disprove any theory, theorist, or study. Rather, the purpose is at least fivefold: 1. To describe an interpersonal process of adolescent identity formation in relation to peers and peer groups, within a Social-Psychological context; 2. To identify a "Vicious Circle" within the process, revealing a possible "cause" of prosocial and antisocial behavior; 3. To hypothesize Outcomes, along an internal-external dimension of satisfaction and acceptance, according to an Attributional approach; 4. To present a model equally-applicable to male and female adolescents; and 5. To present a model to be used in conjunction with, or expand, other models of identity formation, interpersonal processes, and/or social development.

Assumptions

A number of assumptions must be true in order for the model to be valid:

1. **The adolescent possesses the motivation to continue seeking peer groups in his search for identity.** According to Farnsworth (1967), peer groups are the major socializing agents of adolescents. Sullivan (1953) postulated that an adolescent has a *need* for peers and acceptance. If so, the individual is motivated, and will continue to seek new groups according to the model.

2. **The process is continuous.** Each individual will possess a differing degree of need for peers. Depending on internal versus external locus-of-control, and other factors, some individuals may spend more time than others searching for peers, but the search is never complete: "Final identity" is attained only at death.

3. **The individual will belong to more than just one peer group.** Because nobody is entirely "one-dimensional", the individual will continue to seek new relationships even after one has already been found (e.g., not only is he a member of the football team, but he belongs to Boy Scouts also).

4. **The process is the same for females and males.** Volumes have been written about individual, and sex differences, but this model assumes the process is relatively the same for both sexes.

5. **The individual will suffer from lower self-esteem when he is not accepted by peer groups.** According to Kauffman (1981), "...the conclusion that anxiety and low self-concept cause withdrawal and social isolation is not justifiable on the basis of research data. It is more plausible that anxiety and low self-

concept result from the child's lack of social competence."[1]

6. **An individual may become a Loner or Lone Wolf at any point along the way.** In the schematic diagram of the process, Loner and Lone Wolf are shown to result from Low Self-esteem. This is mostly for diagramatical purposes, and is not meant to show that low self-esteem *causes* withdrawal or social isolation. However, it is often this point at which isolation will occur.

The Flowsheet

Definitions

Before the presentation of a step-by-step explanation of the flowsheet, operational definitions of terms are needed:

Peer. "An equal -- one who is equal in one or more respects" (Lafrancois, 1980).

Peer Group. "A group (two or more individuals) of equals -- equals in one or more respects" (Lefrancois, 1980).

Self-esteem. How the adolescent views himself in relation to physical, cultural, functional, and social contexts, depending on his perceptions and attributions.

Compliance. "Behavior by one who is motivated to gain reward or avoid punishment" (Aronson, 1980). This would apply to an individual who finds himself as a member of a peer group solely because he did not want to be rejected by another potential peer group, or because he wanted (needed) to belong to a peer group in order to gain some reward -- not because of specific desired qualities of the group, or individuals in that group (e.g., he may join the French

Club, even though he does not like any of the members, because membership may lead to an eventual scholarship).

Identification. "Conformity by an individual brought about by his desire to be like the influencer" (Aronson, 1980). An individual might join the school band because his best friend is a member, even though he might not know how to play an instrument. Identification is assumed to be on a higher level of identity achievement than compliance, but not as high as internalization.

Internalization. "The most permanent response to social influence, internalization is motivated by an individual's desire to be right" (Aronson, 1980). The highest level of identity achievement according to this model. The individual will not join a group just to avoid rejection, and will not join a group just to be like a friend, he will join a group in order to do what is right for himself, and the group.

Identity. Peer group identity is achieved anywhere on the three-point scale of compliance, identification, and internalization. At this point, the individual is a member of a group and possesses identity. The level of identity attained will affect his resultant self-esteem. If he has internalized the values, beliefs, etc. of the peer group, he will most-likely have a higher self-esteem and remain in the group for a long time. But, if he has merely complied with the group, he will quite possibly suffer from lower self-esteem, and his membership in the group may be short-lived.

Lone wolf. An internally-motivated individual who operates away from group influences in an antisocial manner. The term is borrowed from Lefrancois, and the definition most-closely resembles the "Undersocialized, Aggressive" Conduct Disorder.

Identity as a Product

According to Erikson (1968), "Identity is a unique product, which now meets a crisis to be solved only in new identification with age mates and leader figures outside the family." This flowsheet model describes a *process*, a step-by-step "production line" where raw materials (the individual plus social interactions), are transformed by a process (internal and external acceptance and satisfaction), into a finished product (identity in relation to peers and peer groups). As is often the case in production, byproducts (prosocial and antisocial) are left-over and must be dealt with. Like a company, the individual will either reap the benefits of the quality of the final product and prosper, or wallow in frustration, conflict, or bankruptcy, if the final product is inferior.

Insert Figure 1 here

The Primary Route

Starting at the bottom of the chart, the *Individual* becomes associated with a *Peer Group.* If he *Fits-in,* and is *Accepted* by the *Group,* and if he is *Satisfied* with his role or position in the *Group* (i.e., if both internal and external dimensions have been fulfilled), then the

Individual will either *Comply* with, *Identify* with, or *Internalize* the *Group's Values, Beliefs, and Behaviors,* and will possess an *Identity.*

This route is *The Primary Route* toward identity formation in relation to peers and peer groups, and is identified as such in Figure 1. It is assumed to be the easiest, most conflict-free route:

> Howard *(Individual)* noticed a group of boys *(Peer Group)* playing football at recess. Howard was new at school, but he liked to play football, and he knew right away he "wanted to get to know that group". A couple of days later, Howard asked one of the boys if he could join. . .Howard played football for the rest of the Fall with that group. He liked football and the other kids in the group *(Satisfaction)*, and they liked him *(Acceptance)*. Howard eventually became "a regular member of the group" *(Identity)*. The members of the group all got along so well *(Internalization)*, they often played football, attended movies, dances, and sporting events.

The Secondary Route

If the *Individual* is *Unsatisfied* with the *Group,* he will *Seek A New Group,* or *Try A New Strategy With The Same Group,* until he finally *Fits-in* and is *Accepted,* and is *Satisfied* with the *Group* and his role or position in it (i.e., until both internal and external dimensions have been fulfilled).

If he *Doesn't Fit-in,* or is *Not Accepted by his Peers,* he will suffer from *Lower Self-esteem,* and will *Seek A New Group,* or *Try A New Strategy With The Same Group,* until he finally *Fits-in,* becomes *Satisfied,* and attains *Identity (Compliance, Identification,* or *Internalization of Group Values, Beliefs, Behaviors,* etc.).

Any route other than the Primary Route is a *Seconday Route,* and is assumed to involve more conflicts, frustrations, and trials:

Mary Ann *(Individual)*, a ninth-grader, had spoken briefly with a girl from her Math class, and later noticed her sitting with a group of girls *(Peer Group)* in the cafeteria. Mary Ann knew this group was popular around school, and she believed that if she belonged to the group, she might be quite popular herself. After a couple of lunch periods, it was obvious to Mary Ann that most of the girls in the group were ignoring her, and a couple had been downright rude *(Doesn't Fit-in, Not Accepted)*. Mary Ann felt bad *(Lower Self-esteem)* that the group wasn't accepting her, but she still "wanted to belong". She tried wearing levis *(Alters Strategy, Takes New Action)*, instead of dresses. . .Thereafter, the other girls were a little friendlier, but never seemed to "completely accept her as a member of the group" *(Accepted, at least to a certain extent)*. Mary Ann remained with the group until Christmas *(Satisfied, at least to a certain extent)*, but she was never fully satisfied with her position *(Identity)* in the group. She attended a dance once, but she never got along "great" with the girls *(compliance)*. At Christmas, she began to look for new Groups.

Secondary Routes are normal and healthy, because nobody can always Fit-in, and be Satisfied with a Peer Group the first time, every time. However, sometimes the process is not healthy or normal for the Individual, such as when he becomes caught in *The Vicious Circle*.

The Vicious Circle

Spiraling downward, with each step reinforcing the next, the Individual may find himself in a seemingly-hopeless situation, "The Vicious Circle" (See Figure 2). He will pick-up momentum until he is finally flung-out in one of three possible directions:

1. He will continue to Seek New Groups, hoping for eventual success (but he may also be setting himself up for a fall, as he may be reentering the Vicious Circle);

2. He will give-up Seeking New Groups and external justification,

and react prosocially - he becomes a *Loner.* Internally-motivated, he possesses Identity as a *Prosocial Byproduct* of the Process;

3. He will react antisocially, and become a *Lone Wolf.* He becomes an *Antisocial Byproduct* of the process.

Insert Figure 2 here

Simply described, the Individual Seeks A Group, but finds he Doesn't Fit-in, or is Not Accepted by the Group. This may result in Lower Self-esteem or frustration. So the Individual, working from a new, disadvantageous position, tries again -- he Seeks a New Group, but he is again disappointed, causing even more inner-turmoil. Finally, the Individual might Fit-in, and be Accepted by the Group (although it may not be the original group he had in mind when he began the process -- he may have settled for an "inferior" group, a second choice, because of the disadvantageous position from which he was working). Because he ended-up in a group with which he did not originally wish to belong, the level to which he would Identify with the Group (Compliance vs. Identification vs. Internalization) might suffer.

Loners

The useful, "Prosocial Byproducts" of the process are "Loners". In this model, a Loner has given-up on external rewards and justifications (relatively speaking), and has adopted a more internal set, or system. The Loner is considered to be a prosocial, internally-motivated individual, in short, a mature adult. In this context, he possesses a positively-

connotated, unique, Identity.

Lone Wolves

The less useful, unwanted, "Antisocial Byproducts" of the process are "Lone Wolves". This may occur when an individual gives-up on external and internal processes as well. Resultant behaviors may include forms of depression, alcoholism, delinquency, suicide, learned helplessness, or drug abuse, among others.

The direction from which an individual is propelled from the Vicious Circle is dependant on his previous socialization, coping patterns, the accumulated number of episodes of rejection experienced, opportunity present for prosocial vs. antisocial acts, internal or external locus-of-control, the present psychological condition, individual personality traits, among others.[2]

Outcomes

Heider (1958) postulated the outcome of an action as a function of the effective personal force and the effective environmental force: outcome = f(effective personal force, effective environmental force).

With minor modifications to Heider's Attributional model, this model allows for hypothesized Outcomes along an internal-external (personal, environmental) dimension of acceptance and satisfaction (See Figure 3).

Insert Figure 3 here

Four Outcomes are possible:

1. **Identity.** When an individual is satisfied with his role or position in the group, and the group accepts the individual into the group, he has found Identity (*"He is a Boy Scout."*). Both internal and external conditions have been fulfilled.

2. **Frustration.** When an individual is satisfied with his role or position in the group, but the group does not accept him, he will become frustrated (*"He is in Boy Scouts, but it is hard for him, because the other Scouts don't like him, they won't accept him."*). The internal dimension (satisfaction) has been fulfilled, but the external dimension (acceptance) has not. Therefore, he can not remain satisfied in a group that does not accept him, and he will seek new groups until both dimensions have been fulfilled. Whether it be a different Boy Scout Troop, or an altogether different group, such as the football team, or even if means becoming a Loner, he will probably take action to relieve his frustrations.

3. **Conflict.** If the individual is accepted by the group (fulfilling the external dimension of acceptance), but is personally unsatisfied with his role or position in the group, he will experience conflict (*He is in Boy Scouts, and the other Scouts like and accept him, but he hates Scouting."*). Once again, he will continue to search for new groups, because one will usually not remain in a group with which he is unsatisfied for a long period of time. Again, both conditions need to be fulfilled.

4. **Rebellion.** When an individual is continuously not accepted

by his peers, and is continuously unsatisfied with his role or position in the groups in which he finds himself, he will eventually rebel in one way or another. This rebellion may be prosocial, or antisocial, as previously mentioned (*"He hates the Boy Scouts, the other Scouts hate him, he is going to go out and throw snowballs at cars."*).

Discussion

In this paper a step-by-step description of an interpersonal process of adolescent identity formation in relation to peers and peer groups was presented. A "Vicious Circle" was identified as a possible "cause" of some prosocial and antisocial behaviors. Outcomes were hypothesized along an internal-external dimension of satisfaction and acceptance. The model was likened to a production line, the final product being identity.

It is hoped the model can be used with, or expand, other existing models. There is no doubt that this one model cannot possibly identify, or solve, every problem related to adolescent peer groups, pressures, and relationships. And it is obvious that many important areas of Adolescent and Developmental Psychology relating to identity formation have been omitted, such as intellectual, sexual, moral, familial, and other social and developmental aspects. The model has borrowed liberally from many other schools-of-thought, including cognitive, social, developmental, and behavioral views. It is hoped that the identification of this one interpersonal process can lead to further understanding of identity formation in some small way.

Hopefully, some theoretical value exists in the model. If, for no

other reason, the assumption is made that the process is the same for female, as well as, male adolescents. According to Gallatin (1977), historically, research and theory in Adolescent Psychology has been applicable mostly toward the male.

References

Aronson, E. The Social Animal. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1980, 28-30.

Erikson, E. H. Identity: Youth and crisis. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

Farnsworth, D. L. Are our present adolescents a new breed? New England Psychological Association Review, 1967, 15, 4-10.

Gallatin, J. E. Adolescence and Individuality: A Conceptual Approach to Adolescent Psychology. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1975.

Heider. F. The psychology of interpersonal relations. New York: Wiley, 1958.

Kaufman, J. M. Characteristics of children's behavior disorders (2nd ed.). Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1981, 222.

Lefrancois, G. R. Adolescents (2nd ed.). Belmont, Ca.; Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981.

Sullivan, H. S. The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry. New York: Norton, 1953.

Townshend, P. H. Quadrophenia. MCA Records, Inc., 1973. Quote from the song, "Cut My Hair".

Footnotes

[1]The question of whether an individual's self-esteem suffers because of his present identity, or whether his identity suffers because of his low self-esteem, is not a question I wish to address at the present time.

[2]For a theatrical explanation of the consequences of failed peer group relationships and the Vicious Circle, see the movie, Quadrophenia (The Who, 1977), a powerful statement of adolescent frustrations and anger.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Flowsheet model: *a process of identity formation in relation to peers and peer groups.*

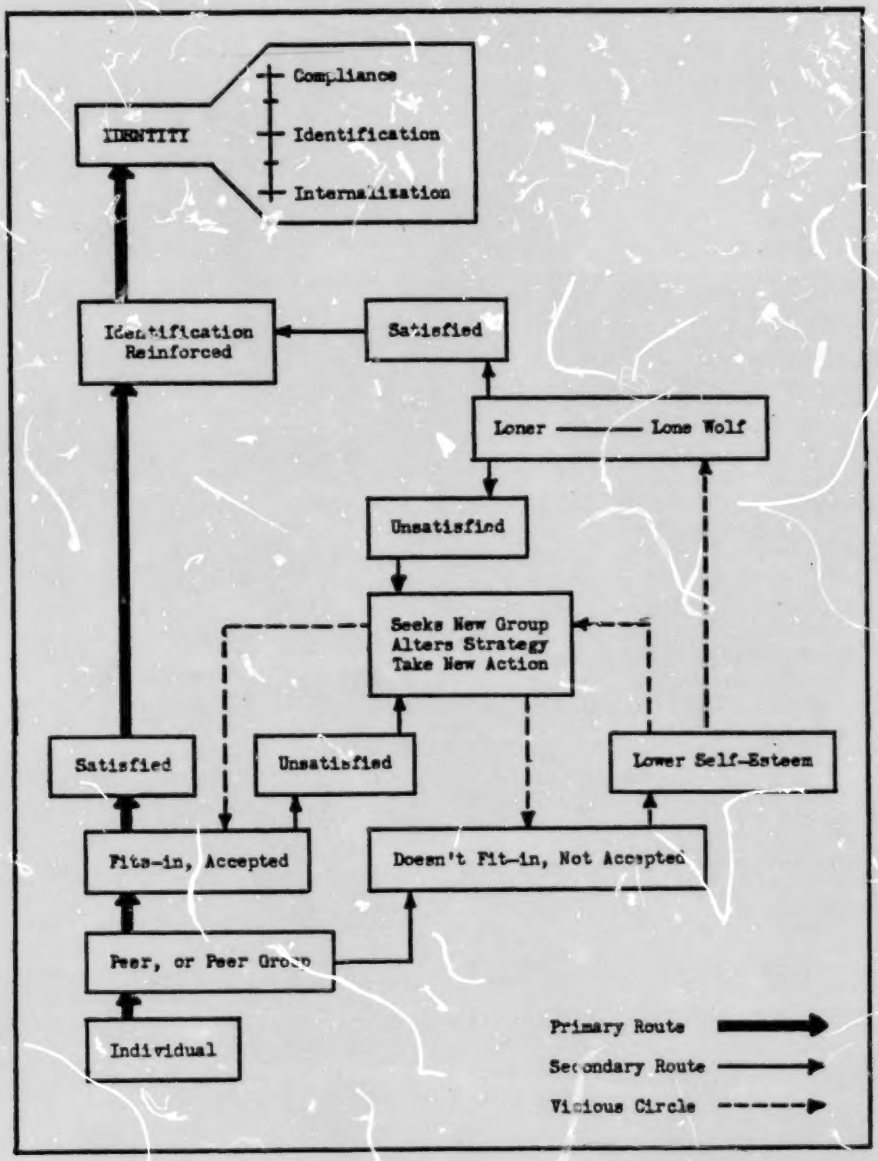

IDENTITY
Compliance
Identification
Internalization
Identification Reinforced
Satisfied
Loner
Lone Wolf
Unsatisfied
Seeks New Group
Alters Strategy
Take New Action
Satisfied
Unsatisfied
Lower Self-Esteem
Fits-in, Accepted
Doesn't Fit-in, Not Accepted
Peer, or Peer Group
Individual
Primary Route
Secondary Route
Vicious Circle

Figure Caption

Figure 2. A "Vicious Circle" of identity formation. Suffering from lower self-esteem with each cycle, the individual will eventually be flung-out in one of three possible directions: he will be *Accepted* by a group, he will become a *Loner*, or he will become a *Lone Wolf*.

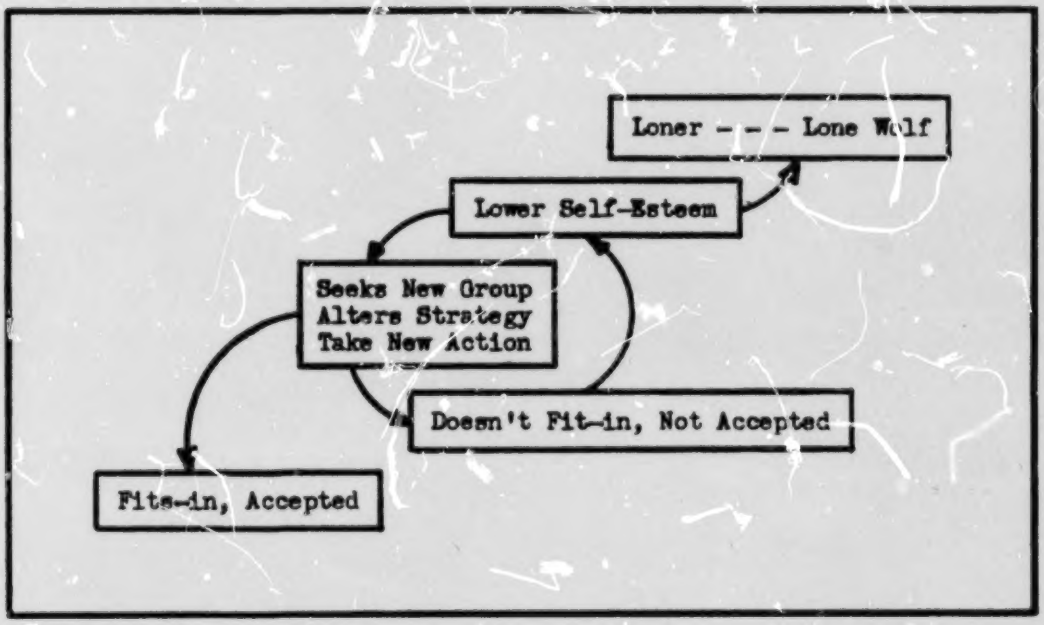
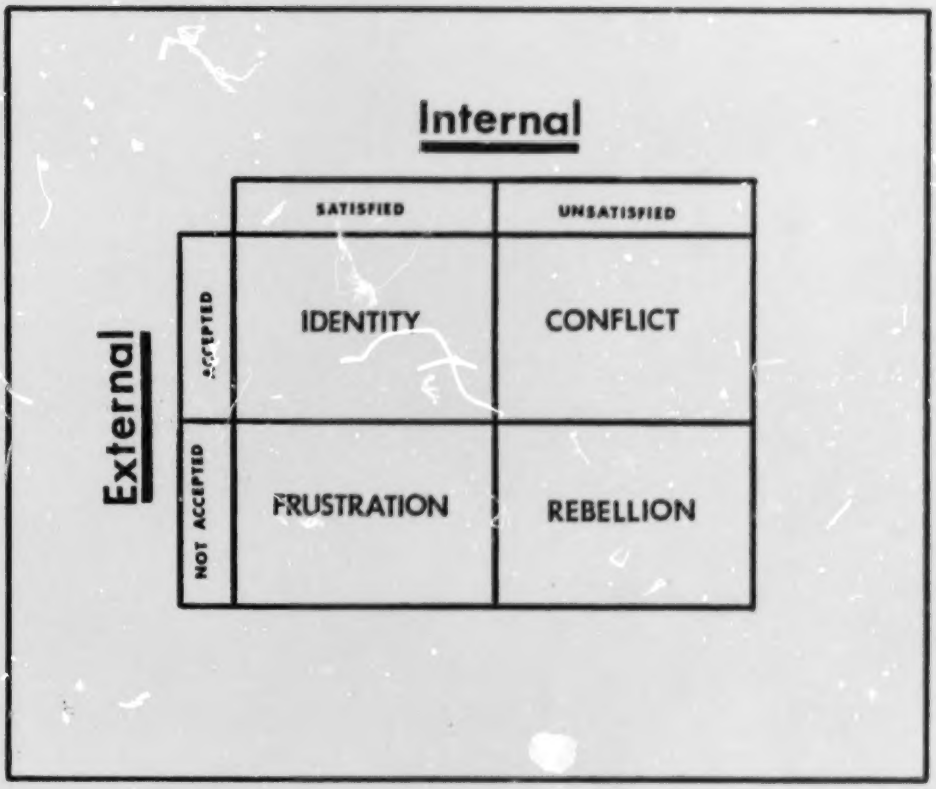

Loner - - - Lone Wolf
Lower Self-Esteem
Seeks New Group
Alters Strategy
Take New Action
Doesn't Fit-in, Not Accepted
Fits-in, Accepted

Figure Caption

Figure 3. Hypothesized Outcomes along an internal-external dimension of satisfaction and acceptance. When the individual is satisfied and accepted, he will possess *Identity*. If he is either not accepted or unsatisfied with his role or position in the group, he will experience *Conflict* or *Frustration*. If he is not accepted, and unsatisfied (for a long-enough period of time), he will *Rebel*.


Internal
SATISFIED
UNSATISFIED
External
ACCEPTED
NOT ACCEPTED
IDENTITY
CONFLICT
FRUSTRATION
REBELLION